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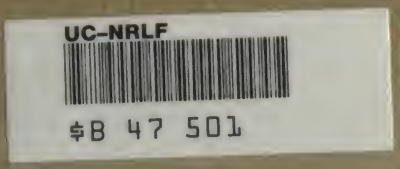

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CHRISTIANITY IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORICAL SCIENCE

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY THE

REV. J. E. CARPENTER, M.A.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

OPENING OF THE 120TH SESSION

16TH OCTOBER, 1905

The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines

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Christianity in the Light of Historical Science.

GENTLEMEN,—

The College which resumes its work to-day, 'exists for the purpose of promoting the study of religion, theology, and philosophy, without insisting upon the adoption of particular doctrines.' This principle is of much wider application than is commonly supposed. In this country, it is true, the conception of religious fellowship without limitation of doctrine or definition of creed has been the inheritance only of an inconspicuous group of churches, which have found three small Colleges sufficient for their needs. But it is also the basis of the Theological Faculty of a great modern University like the Victoria University at Manchester. Early in the last century it became the guiding principle of the Divinity School of Harvard University, the oldest of the American foundations, at Cambridge, Massachusetts. And it provides the field for the whole religious life of the Protestant Churches of an entire European State, the Federation of the Swiss Cantons. Among a robust and energetic people political freedom resulted in a remarkably thorough adoption of religious freedom also. Thirty-one years ago at Geneva the last vestiges of dogmatic control were swept away; and the Church Constitution declared that 'any minister may preach and teach freely on his own responsibility, nor may this liberty be restricted either by confessions of faith or by liturgical formularies.' The Theological Faculty of its University is no less free. When the Conference of 'Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers' met within its walls seven weeks ago, the venerable head of the Faculty, Prof. Chantre, affirmed that Unitarianism stood 'for something more than opposition to an article of the ancient creeds;' it represented 'a free and independent theology, with a method different from that of all orthodoxies, in which

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the search for truth was practised with the same sincerity as in history, science, or philosophy.'

I.

I need not recite the well-worn tale of the steps by which this freedom was won for ourselves, or describe the intellectual, moral, and political forces which have shaped its operation abroad. To find anything really analogous to it we must go behind the schools of Christendom, and mingle with the philosophic theologians of Greece, or, as we may now add, of India. It is among the ironies of history that the great champion of spiritual liberty, who saved Christianity from lapsing into the stagnation of a Jewish sect, should at the same time have been the author of the idea of the Church, founded on specific formulae such as that Jesus was the Messiah and, in that function, also Lord. Here was the germ of a *Credo*, with all its subsequent implications of exclusive salvation, and doom of death for those who remained outside. Such ideas might belong to the promoters of the Greek mysteries; they formed no part of the fabric of common religious thought. Socrates describes Athens as the most free-spoken state in Hellas,[1] not having yet learned his own peril. Plato criticises unsparingly the sacred traditions of the gods, and declares truth the beginning of every good thing both to gods and men.[2] The Sophists undertake to make men able to dispute about divine things,[3] and the corresponding teachers of the Ganges Valley, as we see them around the person of Gotama the Buddha a century before the death of Socrates, publicly question every received belief.

No great religious teacher has analysed more clearly the

[1] Plato, *Gorgias*, 461 E.

[2] *Laws*, v. 730. Yet he will allow no private *rites*: and any one guilty of impiety is to be punished with death, *ibid.* x. 910.

[3] Cp. *Laws*, x. 886—9.

moral and intellectual mischief of the controversial temper than the historic founder of Buddhism. But so completely did he impress upon his followers the love of truth and mutual goodwill, that the widest theological differences made no schism in his Order. Sects might multiply, but they were not torn by jealous rivalries. Even the difficult subject of the person of the Buddha produced no cleavage between opposite views. On the one hand, the men of what was called the 'Little Vehicle' adhered to the ancient tradition which declared that he had lived and died as man, though superior by his Perfect Enlightenment to all other beings in the world. As man he had passed out of life, with that kind of passing away which left not a trace behind. His disciples, therefore, offered him no worship; they sang no hymns; they chanted no litanies; they uttered no prayer; they entreated no help or protection; they neither sought nor enjoyed any communion with the departed Teacher. On the other hand the men of the 'Great Vehicle' affirmed that their master was the Eternal and the Self-Subsistent. Not once only had he appeared on earth, and seemed to be born, to attain enlightenment, and die. Many a time had he worn the semblance of humanity for the welfare of men, but these manifestations did not destroy his everlasting calm. Around this Buddha rose a gorgeous ritual with praise and petition, altar, functionary, and incense. The metaphysical reality which the later scheme offered to faith, the original doctrine absolutely denied. The fellowship after which the believer aspired, to become one with the Buddha-nature, had no existence for the psychological nihilist of the primitive school, who asserted that life was strictly limited to the thought or feeling of the moment. The Truth was summed up for the one in a system of ethical culture, leading to ultimate escape from the round of existences into the void without rebirth: for the other, it meant a religion of faith and love, realised through eternal union with the All-Knowing and All-Holy.

And yet, the professors of these two contradictory Buddhologies, the humanitarian and the theistic, lived and taught side by side. When the Chinese traveller, Yuan Chwang, arrived in 632 A.D. at the great University at Nalanda, south of the Ganges, he found them installed together. As he traversed the nine vast quadrangles round which its colossal buildings were erected, went from one to another of the hundred lecture-rooms where ten thousand students were daily instructed by professors of all the sects, or entered the temples where different rituals were practised, different scriptures read, and different doctrines preached, no bitter sounds of controversy were heard. Under the great trees which adorned the gardens and the park, beside the lotus-ponds, brilliant with bloom, no less than in the academic precincts, there was no wrangling. A common reverence for the founder, a common homage to the same moral ideal, prevented freedom from degenerating into licence, and converted liberty into the bond of peace.

II.

A distinguished modern Buddhist has recently pleaded that the 'absolute' character of one religion need not interfere with the absolute character of another.[1] The Trinitarian theologian will hardly admit his contention that as Christianity already provides three 'Absolutes' within its Godhead, it need not object to the juxtaposition of another outside. It would be more true to say that Buddhism has admitted two 'absolute' religions within its own fold. Both the types which I have indicated, were supposed to rest upon the word of an infallible Teacher; Japanese tradition naively assigning the first to an early, and the second to a later and more fully developed revelation in the final stage of his career. What will the student of theology make of such a plea? The interpreter of the Articles of the Church of England will tell him that the seeming virtues of the Buddha all had the

[1] Prof. Anesaki in the *Hibbert Journal*, Oct., 1905, p. 7.

nature of sin, and the preacher of the path of righteousness was therefore deserving of 'God's wrath and condemnation.' Nay, he will further be warned that if he 'presumes to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect that he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of Nature,' he will be 'had accursed.'[1] If his conscience is vigorous enough to protest against this conclusion, and face the threatened doom, he may take refuge in some philosophical interpretation, under the great names of Schleiermacher or Hegel. They will assure him that there is in truth only one religion in idea and essence. This idea, this essence, lies hidden in all historic religions as their origin and their goal. One has developed it in one direction, another in another; and in Christianity alone has the idea attained complete expression. What is latent elsewhere, is here actualised in full. The dim anticipations of earlier and imperfect systems are brought by Jesus into imperishable form, and shadows melt and blend, absorbed into the realities of eternal light. In this way the 'absolute' character of Christianity is justified from an exactly opposite point of view. Instead of writing 'all false' (with the ecclesiastical theologian) over the map of human faiths except where the stream of Christian revelation has spread from Nazareth, the philosophic theologian pronounces all true—implicitly. Their achievement, indeed, is incomplete, but their purpose is the same: and Christianity remains not only the highest, but the 'absolute' religion. Echoes of this view are heard in our own day in the language of the most distinguished scholar in Christian dogmatics. Theological faculties, it is the warning of Prof. Harnack, should not pass beyond the investigation of the Christian religion, because Christianity in its purest form is not one religion beside others, but '*the* religion,' or, as we might say, religion itself. And the reason for this is that Jesus is not one Master beside others, but *the* Master, and his gospel

[1] Articles ix., xiii., xviii.

corresponds to the innate capacities of humanity unveiled in history.[1] That is, indeed, a noble and inspiring faith. But neither philosophy nor science, as I understand them, permits us to ascribe finality to any single person, or to any specific body of truths.

The fact is that during the last generation the whole study of Christianity has entered on a new phase. Not only has one great religion after another arisen out of the dim and distant past, or even forced itself (as in the case of Japan) on our attention as a vital factor in the living present, but it has been discovered that many of these ancient faiths are intimately connected with Christianity itself. From the point of view of philosophy or science we have learned that while the great religious personalities are, as it were, new centres of energy, imparting fresh impulses of life and thought to their age, they can never be independent of it. However they may stand above it, they must share its outlook, they are in part the products of its religious culture. They may break with its institutions, but they cannot emancipate themselves completely from the intellectual and moral standards which encompass them. From end to end of our Bible this fact is now made clear. You cannot understand the book of Genesis or the book of Revelation without constant reference to the mythological conceptions of ancient Babylonia. Turn to the Prophets, and you will find that their hopes for Israel are always conditioned by the national circumstances. They announce the divine purpose amid the clash of empires and the fall of kingdoms; time does not always realise their visions, but 'God fulfils himself in many ways.' With the Persian supremacy new suggestions of theodicy (to which it will be my duty in the coming session to invite your attention) fall on the fruitful soil of Judaism. The Messianic hope takes another form and acquires a wider significance. Fresh problems

[1] 'Die Aufgabe der theolog. Fakultäten und die Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte.' (1901). *Reden und Aufsätze*, ii., 172.

of the world and its duration, the earth and heavens and the regions of the dead, of the peoples and their claims to salvation, are forced upon the thought of Israel's seers. They find their solution on the one hand in the magnificent universalism of the later Psalms, with their splendid visions of the nations of the earth bound together in one polity of faith and peace, and, on the other, in expectations of judgment and the life to come which beget an entire literature of Apocalypse. Into the midst of these hopes Jesus is born. The story of his life is related under the conviction that they are destined to be fulfilled in him. You will soon learn how complicated are the questions thus generated. Behind the literary enquiries as to the ultimate materials of our Gospels in early tradition, their first written forms, and the editorial activities under which they assumed their present shape, lie the far more significant historical enquiries: 'Are these things true?' What are the influences which have moulded the record? What was the actual Jesus whose radiant image gleams on us through the golden haze of the Gospel-page? This is the greatest problem of historical religion. When you address yourselves to it, be not afraid that you are belittling an exalted object of faith; it must be the worthiest homage to his greatness to seek to know him as he really was.

III.

But for that purpose the Gospels must be read not in the light of the philosophical theology of the fourth century, but in the glowing expectations of the first. There is a certain atmosphere of intellectual culture, of moral passion, of religious imagination, which envelopes them and plays through them. You must accustom yourselves to this atmosphere: it is very different from our own. You must learn, for instance, to look out upon the world not as history has shown it to us, not as modern science now conceives it, but on the limited scale of the Hebrew universe lying plastic in God's hand, with its seven heavens above,

filled with thrones and dominions, powers and principalities, and the abyss below, the dwelling-place of Satan and his hosts. The message that the kingdom of God is at hand brings Jesus into immediate conflict with these agencies. How is this to be explained? On the one side we are warned by the Bishop of Birmingham that if the theory of demoniacal possession was not true, Jesus was not even a perfect prophet. On the other, it is suggested by Prof. Sanday that the Eternal Word accepted this belief as part of his mental outfit just as he accepted the principles of Hebrew grammar, when he condescended to be born a Jew. With these theological alternatives historical science has nothing to do. It is concerned only with the facts; and the main facts for this purpose are that this belief had had a history of thousands of years in the adjacent countries of Babylonia and Egypt, that it was in truth a common possession of the Semitic race,—nor theirs alone, for it belongs to the lower culture all around the world, and lives on this day in a hundred curious forms enshrined in the practice of the higher faiths.

To this imaginative background again, belongs the beautiful saying about the little ones whose 'angels do always behold the face of my father who is in heaven.'[1] Under the symbol of an oriental court where only the officers of the highest rank have the right of entry, Jewish belief pictured the heavenly king surrounded by the angels of the 'Face' or 'Presence.' They stood at the summit of the celestial hierarchy. Near them (according to the *Secrets of Enoch*[2]) were 'the angels over all the souls of men, who write down all their works and their lives before the face of the Lord.' But the angels of the 'little ones' are, strictly speaking, neither guardians nor recording officers. They belong to the groups of heavenly counterparts, like the heavenly Paradise, the heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly sanctuary, the heavenly altar, and even the heavenly *Torah* (Law) into which God looked when he would create the world.

[1] *Matt.* xviii. 10. [2] xix. 5.

They correspond, as is now generally understood, to the Persian *Fravashis*, once the spirits of the dead, who became the invisible types of the realities of earth.[1]

Or, once more, consider the singular complex of anticipations suggested by the answer ascribed to Jesus, when Peter, boasting of the sacrifices of discipleship, enquires 'What then shall we have?' 'In the regeneration,' says Jesus solemnly, 'when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'[2] What is the 'regeneration,' the *Palingenesía?* It is the renewal of the world which apocalyptic faith had long learned to expect. It belongs ultimately, perhaps, to speculations of extreme antiquity about world-periods, possibly (in Babylonia) a great world-year,[3] which must have been wide-spread through Western Asia. They even appear in India (were they derived from Mesopotamia?) after the Vedic age, and they were incorporated into early Buddhism, where they produced a very remarkable equivalent of the Messianic age. They probably modified, though in a different way, the conceptions of the last things which belonged to the cycle of Iranian hope. There they formed a striking feature in the splendid theodicy of the Zend Avesta, where the end of the existing order should arrive, the general resurrection and the last judgment should take place, the powers of evil should be for ever overthrown, and hell itself should be brought back for the enlargement of the world. The cyclic view of the cosmic history worked out by Hindu thought,[4] has its match, curiously

[1] See Söderblom's admirable study in the *Revue de l'Hist. des Religions*, xxxix., 373 ff; Moulton, *Journ. Theol. Studies*, 1902, p. 516; Moffatt, *Hibbert Journ.*, i. 778; Blau, *Jewish Encycl.* i. 587*a*.

[2] *Matt.*, xix. 28.

[3] See the clear sketch by Prof. Jeremias in the *Hibbert Journal*, Oct., 1905, p. 218.

[4] To the destroying agencies, fire and water (Jeremias), Indian cosmology added wind. For the early Buddhist account of the destruction by fire, through the appearance of successive suns up to seven, cf. *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, iv. p. 100. A description of the renewal of the world will be found in the Aggañña Sutta in the third vol. of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, which I hope to publish next year.

enough, in the Stoic philosophy, where the end of the world would be accomplished through a vast conflagration, the *ekpurôsis*, which is immediately followed by the *palingenesía*, or, as Cicero calls it, the *renovatio*. 'In the renewal of the world' is, in fact, the phrase of the Syriac translators of the Peshitta.[1] In this new world for which the later prophecy (*Isaiah* lxv. 17—18) had begun to look, the prayer 'Thy kingdom come' should be fulfilled. The Son of Man should sit (like Vohu Mano, Ahura himself, and the Immortal Holy Ones[2]) on a radiant throne, and there his twelve Apostles should share his high prerogative of judgment. To this group of expectations the apostle Paul makes such definite reference that it plainly occupied a large place in Christian hope. When he would dissuade the Corinthians from going before a secular tribunal for the settlement of their disputes, he asks them if they do not know that the saints shall judge the world,—nay, he adds, 'Know ye not that ye shall judge angels?'[3] The angelic powers were by no means all holy. In the second heaven Enoch saw regions of darkness where prisoners were suspended, and the apostates who had been cast down from the fifth heaven awaited their eternal doom;[4] while the earlier *Testament* of Levi locates there 'fire and snow and ice, ready against the day of the ordinance of the Lord,' for the punishment of the spirits of the lawless ones.[5] In the heavenly ranks were principalities and authorities which must be brought to nought, and the Messiah's reign would not reach its term till the last enemy should be subdued.[6] With him, accordingly, would the saints be associated

[1] In the Sinaitic-Syriac the text is defective. Burkitt's *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, 'in the new birth.'

[2] *Zend Avesta*, in *S.B.E.* iv. p. 215.

[3] 1 *Cor.* vi. 2, 3.

[4] *Secrets of Enoch*, viii. 1—3.

[5] Prof. Charles, *Secrets of Enoch*, p. xxxv. Beer's translation, Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen des A. Ts.* ii. 466, is slightly different.

[6] Cp. 1 *Cor.* xv. 24—26.

in co-sovereignty;[1] and in this jurisdiction the twelve tribes of Israel are placed under the authority of the twelve apostles. I do not ask now whether this was really part of the thought of Jesus; it is part of the picture of him in the Gospels;[2] and the student who is anxious to understand Christianity in the light of historical science, cannot ignore it.[3]

IV.

Pass beyond the limits of Israel and its hopes, and you enter a world of religious phenomena so varied as to be practically inexhaustible, and all the patient labour of the last thirty years has only begun to exhibit to us its contents. At every turn you are confronted with beliefs resembling those which pervade our New Testament, so that Prof. Cheyne has recently attempted, in a very remarkable little volume, *Bible Problems*, to trace, archæologically, the roots of four great doctrines associated with the person of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, the Descent into Hades, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. The inscriptions reveal to you the very language of Christianity in the making. The hymns and liturgies of other faiths derive their strength from similar ideas, and express similar aspirations. Does Jesus, according to the Gospels, give sight to the blind and call the dead back to life? So does Æsculapius. He, too, is wondrously born; he, too, is in danger in his infancy. He, too, heals the sick and raises the dead,[4] till Zeus, jealous of this infringement of his prerogatives, smites him with his thunderbolt, and translates him to the world above.[5] But from his heavenly seat he

[1] Cp. *Rom.* v. 17; 1 *Cor.* iv. 8; 2 *Tim.* ii. 2; *Rev.* xx. 4, v. 10.

[2] Cp. *Luke* xxii. 30.

[3] Modern orthodoxy appears to be frankly abandoning these ideas. Thus the editor of the *Expository Times*, Oct. 1905, writes à propos of 1 *Thess.* v. 16, 'Was St. Paul mistaken? He has not descended with a shout yet. Will he never descend? For the most part the church of Christ is now content to answer, Never.' The *Credo* and the *Te Deum*, then, must be revised.

[4] Pausanias, ii. 26, 5.

[5] Roscher, *Lexikon der Gr. und Rom. Mythologie*, 'Asklepios.'

continues to exercise his healing power. His worship spreads all through Greece. After a great plague in Rome, in 291 B.C., it is planted on a sacred island in the Tiber. In the first century of our era you may follow it all round the Eastern Mediterranean. In Greece alone Pausanias mentions sixty-three *Asklepeia*. There were others in Asia Minor, Egypt, Sicily; nearly two hundred being still traceable. They were both sanctuaries and medical schools. A number of inscriptions relate details of cures, or consecrate the *ex-votos* which are still dedicated at Loretto or Lourdes.[1] The temple by the Tiber won special fame in the reign of Antoninus Pius for the restoration of the sight of a blind man. Æsculapius himself bears the titles 'king' and Θέος σωτήρ, 'divine saviour.' He was even σωτὴρ τῶν ὅλων, 'saviour of the universe.' In his cosmic significance he was thus identified with Zeus himself, and on earth he was felt to be 'most loving to man' (cp. Tit. iii. 4). Harnack, in one of the fascinating chapters of his *Expansion of Christianity*, has traced the action of these influences on the later Christianity conceived as a religion of healing or salvation, medicine alike of body and of mind. It must be enough now to remind you that the god was believed to reveal himself to those who sought his aid;[2] and Origen affirms that a great multitude both of Greeks and barbarians acknowledge that they have frequently seen, *and still see*, no mere phantom, but Æsculapius himself, healing and doing good, and foretelling the future.[3] Was it surprising, then, that

[1] Some interesting samples from the Epidaurian Sanctuary are given by Frazer, *Paus.* vol. ii. p. 249.—It was at Epidaurus that the inscription quoted by Porphyry (*De Abstin. Anim.* ii. 19) demanded of the worshipper a consecrated heart:—

'Into an odorous temple he who goes
Should pure and holy be; but to be wise
In what makes holiness, is to be pure.'

[2] Usually in dreams; see (among other cases cited by Frazer) the very curious record of the sceptic whose fingers were all paralysed but one. He scoffed at the tablets relating the cures, but fell asleep in the Dormitory, and dreamed that as he was playing dice in the temple and was about to make a throw, the god seized his hand and straightened out his fingers. In the morning he went forth whole. This was apparently somewhere between 350 and 200 B.C. (Frazer, ii. 248).

[3] *Contra Cels.* iii. 24.

in states of exalted emotion the disciple of Jesus should believe that he saw Christ? If religion is to be treated after the modern fashion, psychologically, as having a basis in experience, you cannot settle beforehand to affirm the one and deny the other.

Or, study the language which gathered in Egypt and in Syria, during the centuries before our era, round the conception of the divine King. In the temples by the Nile it is of immemorial antiquity; and the whole process of the incarnation is naively displayed upon the walls.[1] In later days the Ptolemies were the 'beneficent gods,' Θεοὶ εὐεργέται. Ptolemy V., the 'god manifest,' was termed αἰωνόβιος, 'immortal'; he was likened to the Sun, and actually designated the living image of Zeus.[2] Antiochus is the 'God and Saviour.' Julius Cæsar is called 'Saviour' at Athens, and Ephesus described him as the 'God manifest and the common Saviour of human life.' Still more remarkable is the language of the inscriptions discovered a few years ago at Priené and Halicarnassus by the German archæological expedition, instituting the birthday of Augustus as a general festival from which the New Year should be dated. It is hailed as the beginning of life. Augustus has been sent by Providence for the welfare of man. He is a saviour destined to make war cease, so that the birthday of the 'god' is become the beginning of glad tidings *(evangelia)* to the world, for he is the saviour of the whole human race.[3] Elsewhere he is the son of Zeus the liberator; or, again, lord of Europe and Asia, and star of all Greece, who has arisen as 'great saviour Zeus.' At Philæ, once more in the cycle of Egyptian theological ideas, he is himself identified with Zeus the liberator, with the remarkable addition, ἐκ Ζανὸς πατρός, 'out of Father Zeus.'[4] It is probably

[1] See the figures from Luxor given by Moret, *Du Caractère Religieux de la Royauté Pharaonique* (1902), p. 51.

[2] Rosetta stone, *C. I. Gr.* 4697 (3).

[3] The inscriptions can be conveniently consulted in the appendix to Soltau's essay, *The Birth of Jesus Christ*, tr. Canney (1903), p. 67.

[4] Wendland, Σωτήρ, in Preuschen's *Zeitschr. für N.T. Wissenschaft*, 1904, p. 343.

a piece of that 'vigour and rigour' which Matthew Arnold ridiculed in German criticism, when Soltau seeks in the inscriptions concerning the birthday of Augustus the actual origin of the Gospel narratives of the Nativity, just as I hold it equally overstrained to derive the shepherds of Luke from the Mithra-legend, or to identify the angels' throng with the shining *devas* of Buddhist piety. But the accumulating force of these parallels which it has been the work of the historical science of the last decades to bring to light, enables us to realise with more and more clearness why the imagination of the early church should have chosen these forms in which to express its love and reverence. They were the forms which the religious culture of the age supplied, and there were no others. The Gentile language acquired new meaning when, to use Prof. Gardner's happy figure, it was 'baptised into Christ.' But in entering this high fellowship did it carry with it historic truth?[1]

It may be asserted, however, that these phrases were after all only the debased coinage of political flattery. Turn, then, to the group of ideas pervading the various mysteries through which the religions of Western Asia opened to the initiate the pathway of immortality and the promise of divine life. The early Christian salvation is bound up in its primitive form with the Messianic Kingdom, the expectation of the resurrection and the judgment. It is something, that is, to be realised hereafter, at the end of the age. Side by side with this in the writings of the apostle Paul, appears another type, effected through the mystical identification of the experience of the believer with the risen Christ, so that baptism becomes a symbolic communion with the Messiah's death and resurrection. Modern researches into the cults of Isis, of Attis, and above all of Mithra, have shown that here, too, the primitive church was in contact with desires for spiritual re-birth that had long been deep-rooted in

[1] What that historic truth was, I have recently tried to say briefly elsewhere (*First Three Gospels*, 3rd ed., chap. viii).

the East, though they had never entered Judaism. In the remarkable liturgy published two years ago by Prof. Dietrich, the disciple prays to be reborn with the help of water and Spirit; he entreats the god to 'abide' with him in his soul and not forsake him; and concludes, 'Hail to thee, Lord, sovereign of water! Hail, founder of the earth! Hail, mighty one of Spirit. Lord, being born again I pass out of life, in that I am being exalted, and being exalted die. Born of the birth which begets life, I depart unto death, and go the way as thou hast instituted.'[1] Pfleiderer has not hesitated to suggest that the rites of Adonis, celebrated at Antioch to commemorate his death and resurrection, may have supplied to the Apostle Paul the mould into which he could pour the new life of Christian experience.[2] The death of Attis was followed on the fourth day by the feast of joy which celebrated his ascension to the world of light. 'Attis has returned from the realm of the dead,' ran the message from the high priest, 'Rejoice ye in his *parousia*.' It was apparently at the same festival that the priest anointed the mouths of the worshippers, with the low chant—

> 'Be of good cheer, ye faithful, for the god is saved:
> For there will be salvation to us from our trials.'[3]

At any rate it is in this direction that modern enquiry is seeking for the antecedents of the Pauline doctrine of the fellowship of the Christian believer with his Lord, summed up (in contrast to the demands of the Jewish law) in the familiar formula, 'justification by faith.' I will not now attempt to pursue these difficult ways, where the student must be content to take slow steps before any results can be said to be assured. Rather let me present to you an analogy from a totally different field, by way of illustrating what has been aptly called the 'sympathy of religions.'

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[1] *Eine Mithras Liturgie*, 1903, p. 14.

[2] *Die Entstehung des Christenthums*, 1905, p. 147.

[3] Anrich, *Das Antike Mysterienwesen*, p. 51; Pfleiderer, *The Early Christian Conception of Christ*, p. 95; Hepding, *Attis, seine Mythen und sein Kult*, 1903, p. 167.

V.

The higher faiths of India have this in common with Christianity that they are all of them religions of deliverance. To those who are entangled in the weary round of rebirths they offer liberation; and inasmuch as the detaining causes are mental blindness and moral wrong, they seek to rescue men from ignorance and sin. They are agreed, moreover, in rejecting legal morality or ceremonial rite. Only the higher insight and the disciplined will can secure release from the attachments of earth: and whether the higher insight consists (with Vedântism) in the recognition of what we might call the identity of the individual with the universal Spirit, or (with early Buddhism) in the perception that there is no permanent spirit at all, either in the individual or the world, it matters not. Both demand essentially the same thing, the conquest of evil, the victory over self. But I have already remarked that the later Buddhism of the Great Vehicle accepted precisely those ontological realities which Gotama had himself so peremptorily rejected; and when once the Buddha had been recognised as the Eternal and the Self-Subsistent, a way of divine fellowship was open which had hitherto been closed. Was that to be attained through philosophical insight or through moral endeavour? There was a third answer possible, and it was at last discovered: deliverance was to be realised by faith. The schools indeed differed widely, and as the centuries passed, fresh sub-divisions tended continually to arise, especially where Buddhism was still active, as in China and Japan. Already in the second century of our era the worship of a particular form of Buddha had been introduced into China, under the double name of Amitâbha and Amitâyus, 'Infinite Light' and 'Infinite Life.'[1] The origin of this remarkable cultus is unknown. It expressed itself in one of the most gorgeous of the Buddhist apocalypses, the exuberant delineation of the 'Pure

[1] The first translation of the Amitâyus Sūtra is known to have been made between 148—170 A.D., but it was subsequently lost. Eitel, *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism*, 2nd ed. p. 8.

Land,' where there is 'no idea of self or others,' and hence no 'inequality, strife, or dispute': where the blessed are 'without envy because they do not hanker after the happiness of others,' and being 'full of beneficent and tender thought,' by the light of wisdom shine more brightly than the sun.[1]

This book became the foundation of the Pure Land Sect of Japan under Genku in 1175 A.D. Birth in that world, in the eternal presence of the Buddha, is not, however, the reward of the believer's works. It is due, on the other hand, to an act of faith, which expressed itself in the invocation of the sacred name.[2] This exercise, however, still carried with it some idea of merit: and though the Blessed One, at the moment of the believer's death, arrived with a heavenly escort to conduct him to the Land of Bliss, he still needed even there long service of righteousness ere he was ripe for the true goal of Buddhahood. It was reserved for Genku's disciple Shin-ran, often (though, in my judgment quite erroneously) called the Luther of Japan, to carry the principle of faith still further, to abandon all reliance on personal merit, *Ji-riki* or 'self-power,' and rely solely on the *Ta-riki*, the 'other power' of Amitâbha's original Vow.[3] On this conception of 'salvation by faith' arose the so-called 'True Sect,' the most vigorous and wealthy of the Buddhist sects in Japan. The historical Buddhism of Gotama of the Sākya clan has disappeared. The crowd of other Buddhas who had become competitors for the homage of the faithful, is dispersed. Shin-ran forbade all worship to any but Amida. The laborious and difficult exertions of self-conquest were abandoned. Thankful remembrance of the mercies of Amida summed up the Teaching (the Law, *dharma*). As the creed of Shonin (*ob.* 1473) expressed it two centuries later: 'Rejecting all religious austerities and all other action, giving up all idea of self-power, we rely upon Amida Buddha

[1] See Prof. Max Müller's translation, *S.B.E.* xlix. p. 55 ff.

[2] Genku is said to have uttered it 60,000 times a day.

[3] This was the Vow of universal deliverance which was the foundation of salvation through Amitâbha: *S.B.E.*, xlix., pp. 12—24.

with the whole heart for our salvation, ... believing that at the moment of putting our faith in Amida Buddha our salvation is settled. From that moment the invocation of his name is observed as an expression of thankfulness for Buddha's mercy. Moreover, being thankful for the reception of this doctrine from the founder and succeeding chief-priests, whose teachings were so benevolent and as welcome as light in a dark night, we must also keep the laws which are fixed for our duty during our whole life.'[1] There is no antinomianism here. But the Shin-Shu teaching approaches closely to Christian Evangelicalism (as contrasted with the sect of the Pure Land) by declaring that the advent of Amida to the believer is not postponed till death; it is present and immediate. In this life he receives the assurance of his salvation. In other words, the Buddha dwells in his heart by faith, and in lowly reliance on his mercy he is already one with his heavenly Lord. It is for that reason that he may worship no other; and for the same cause all prayer for temporal blessings is forbidden. No charms or spells may be employed to avert evil. Calamity has its root in the misdeeds of a past birth: the moral order cannot be turned aside by the possession of a talisman. No help may be sought from Amida save for spiritual deliverance. 'There is no miracle,' says a Shin-Shu writer, 'so great as that oft-recurring one, that those who are so sinful can become Buddha by a single thought of relying upon Amitâbha.'[2] The modern Shin-Shu tract might have come straight from some evangelical depôt. A little boy of pious parents lies dying at the age of eight. His weeping relatives stand beside the bed. 'Do not weep,' says the child, 'I shall soon be with Amida in paradise, and there I shall wait for you. Tell my brother to be a good boy; I want him to be with us there.' The unbelieving doctor is of course immediately converted, and joins the True Sect. Do you think this is a

[1] Lloyd, *Trans. Asiatic Soc. of Japan*, xxii. 414.

[2] Lloyd, *op. cit.* 420.

parody? It is perfectly serious, though it may conceivably be a copy. Here, however, is a brief chant from the Buddhist hymnal, whose pedigree goes back to the thirteenth century:—

'Shoreless is the sea of misery caused by birth and death,
And we for a long time were sunk beneath its waves:
But Amida, taking us into the ship of his great mercy,
By that, all alone, carries us across safely.
Moreover, the great mercy of Amida's prayer,
That resides in the ship of the Great Vow,
When we were tossing on the sea of birth and death,
Puts forth his pity, and takes us on board.'[1]

So the original 'ethical culture' of the historical Gotama has been converted into a kind of Unitarian Evangelicalism from which the first Founder has been entirely eliminated; yet the central conception of deliverance from sin and suffering remains unchanged.

VI.

And we are still face to face with the same problem. Around us are dim masses of our people whom the great principles of religion, as we understand them, never touch. I will not disguise from you that the task of the teacher of to-day is weighted with difficulty. The fields of historical enquiry are enormous; the pathways of religious philosophy are intricate; the social phenomena whose study will (I am convinced) demand more and more of your energy, are infinitely complex; and you may well be bewildered at the magnitude of the tasks which await you. Be not impatient. It is not God's method to set us short and easy ways to the truth, the righteousness, the love, wherein lie salvation. Do not, however, expect from this College more than it can give. It can open to you the sources of knowledge: it can suggest to you wise means of learning: it may help you to shape the word which the Spirit plants within your soul. But there is no school of prophecy except life; and the key to life lies in the service of others. The historic study of religion may be one form of that service. That is its only justification: that

[1] Lloyd, *op. cit.*, xxii., 464.

makes it a high calling: and in the present state of our religious world, I hold it to be a necessary one,—for some. It needs noble gifts, courage and industry, the clear unprejudiced eye, the trained judgment, the heart of lowliness and trust. It may be a means of life. In the broad sense, it is in large measure the spring of that revival of the fundamental ideas of Jesus which, in spite of frequent lapses and discouragements, has been slowly going on among us for a whole generation. You have only to look at one of the great creations of modern Christianity, the Salvation Army, to realise what vital power the Gospel aim 'to seek and to save that which was lost' may still possess. I may be told that its theology is crude, that its foundation-doctrine of an eternal hell is a ghastly slander on the Father's love, that its discipline is autocratic and tyrannical, that its methods are sometimes childish, and its results uncertain. Make what deductions you please; you will still (I think) have to admit that through thousands of its devoted officers the Spirit of God has brought new life to the degraded and the fallen. Were any testimony needed to the power of personality in religion,—the splendid and supporting lesson of historical study,—you would find it here before your very eyes. It is part of a great divine law, it would seem, that the Churches which do not care about saving others, shall have considerable difficulty in saving themselves. Hitherto liberal Theology has had so much to do in pleading its own justification, it has had so hard a task to secure any kind of recognition, that it has had little energy to spare for other duties. That day, thank God, is going by—nay gone. But liberal Theology will exercise no vital force until it has become something more than the interest of the student, and issues from collegiate retreats, or solitary churches, as Channing sent it forth more than two generations ago, charged with a message for the regeneration of man. Wide is the field of human life; gigantic the forces that are arrayed upon it. But, as Emerson somewhere said, 'Thoughts rule the world,' and the

greatest of thoughts, embodied in the immense social conception of 'the kingdom of God,' and summed up in the command 'Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,' are acquiring fresh vigour as they receive new interpretation on a scale such as Jesus himself could never have conceived. Reserve, then, some weekly hours for refreshment and quickening through the lives of those who in our own day have striven to carry into different spheres of action the spirit of Christ: shall I name three which have recently come within my reach?—James Legge, missionary and teacher, Father Dolling, ritualist slum-priest, William Rathbone, merchant and legislator. Remember that you are vowed to the service of man. The way to that service lies for the present through the College class, through the moral and intellectual demands of your studies, through the steadfast cultivation of those habits of body and mind, of heart and will, which alone can give you the mastery over yourselves and your work. I do not invite you, then, to leisured learning or to ways of ease. I call for strenuous effort and laborious days. I bid you remember that your years here are a trust, committed to you by God who is the Author of your being, and by this College which gives you the means to follow the special way of service you have chosen. Be not disheartened that your numbers are few, that the technicalities of study are sometimes dull, that you cannot have new ideas with which to make a new heaven and a new earth every day. These are the fallacies of undisciplined expectation. Turn your eyes to the high ideal inscribed over the portal of this College. Look up, in your hours of weariness or languor to Truth, to Liberty, and to Religion, and you will know that in their fellowship you need never want for strength or joy.

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